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NATO AND INCREASING SOVIET NAVAL PRESSURE

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A MONOGRAPH

by

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The Soviet Navy's tremendous growth and the expansion of its area of
operations offer a new and growing threat to the defense plans of the NATO
nations. The new Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean is particu-
larly significant. Since World War II, the Mediterranean has been con-
sidered an exclusively "Western" area of operations; however, that is no
longer the case. Currently, the US Sixth Fleet is usually outnumbered by
the Soviet fleet at any given time in the Mediterranean. NATO is aware
of this deficiency and is moving toward a solution--possibly by the
establishment of a true NATO fleet. This would do away with territorial
areas and the inherrent divisiveness that exists under current naval
strategic policies. The problem is large, the criticality is acute, and
by the 1980's the USSR may well be the greatest naval power in existence.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mountains of press copy and thousands of commentator words recently have been devoted to the growing Soviet naval strength worldwide, and, in particular, in the Mediterranean. As is generally true, most of the articles and comments are based on individual investigation, other media comments, congressional hearings and just plain speculation. It is not intended that this paper will reveal the "real situation" or even the whole story; however, what I have tried to do, within unclassified limits, is to look at the situation through the eyes of those persons whose professions require that they stay current and knowledgeable regarding the US naval strategy and armament compared with the USSR. Further, I have attempted to use current information so far as possible since world strategy today is moving at such a pace as to make speculations of just a few years ago no longer of any consequence.

The Historical Section of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) has described the USSR naval development of the last two decades in several papers put together before, during and after a 1971 major commanders meeting, Allied Command Europe (ACE), commemorating the 20 years of SHAPE's existence. The bulk of the information furnished in the second and third sections of this report comes from the written reports and speeches generated from this conference. My personal thanks to Colonel Bob Sawyer, SHAPE Historian, for the valuable information which I shall use with appreciation and confidence.

II. USSR NAVAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE PAST 20 YEARS

By tradition, a "land animal" the Soviet Union made little use
of her navy during World War II. As a result, many of her ships
were old and in a poor state of repair at the end of the war.
However, World War II had shown the USSR the value of submarines
against the long sea-lines of the Western nations, and the vast
successes displayed by the US Navy in the Pacific Theater were not
lost on the Soviet military chiefs. The build-up of an extensive
naval force received first priority. From a virtually insignificant
number, the Soviet submarine fleet grew in size to 300 by 1954 and
to 430 by 1960. The majority were long range attack submarines
designed to harass NATO's sea lines of communication. In the late
1950's two developments added to the potential of submarines.
First, nuclear power submarine performance allowed them to remain
submerged and virtually undetected for months on end. Second, the
USSR began to equip its boats with cruise missiles, giving them
the ability to attack land targets on the European and American
coasts. In the early 1960's the Soviet submarine fleet reached
its peak in terms of size; since then there has been an emphasis on
quality. Nuclear powered boats now constitute nearly 25 percent
of the fleet of 350 submarines. The Y Class submarine, similar
to the American POLARIS, and carrying 16 ballistic missiles
launched from underwater, is now on regular patrol in the Atlantic.
To back up this underwater threat, the Soviet navy has built up a
fleet of surface ships which is now second in size only to that

of the United States. Starting in the early 1950's, the Soviets
concentrated their efforts on large gun-armed cruisers and destroyers
to counter the NATO strike fleets and to defend the homeland
against assault from the sea. Many of these old cruisers and
destroyers are still in commission, but since 1960 there has been
an increasing emphasis on building missile-armed ships. Unlike
western navies, the Soviet Navy has no aircraft carriers to extend
the range of its weapons and to provide fighter air cover for the
fleet. The Soviets, presumably believing that carriers are too
vulnerable and expensive, have placed their reliance on surface-
to-air and surface-to-surface missiles to fill those roles, so
much that now over forty percent of all major surface ships are
armed with missiles. Surface-to-surface missiles, such as those
fitted in the KRESTA class cruiser, with a range of 400NM and
capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, significantly enhance the
offensive capability of the Soviet Navy.[1]

Soviet shipbuilding efforts have not, however, concentrated
entirely on large warships. In 1960 the OSA and KOMAR fast patrol
boats first entered service. Construction of these boats armed
with 25NM STYX surface to surface missiles has continued, and the
USSR and her Warsaw Pact allies now have about 200 of these highly
effective craft.[2]

Thus, in the past two decades the Soviet Navy has achieved
one of the most remarkable transformations in military history:
from a fifth rate naval power in 1950 it has become a modern,
sophisticated fleet of some 1,500 combat vessels today. This

transformation has not been concerned with ships alone. Soviet

naval aviation and amphibious forces—both nonexistent at the end

of World War II—have been developed as well. Supersonic aircraft

armed with 300NM air-to-surface missiles or equipped to hunt and

kill submarines range daily over the world's oceans and complement

their surface and submarine counterparts. The Warsaw Pact naval

infantry, numbering some 16,000 men armed with the latest weapons,

stand ready to seize the entrances to land-locked seas or to assist

the ground forces by actions behind enemy lines.

III. CHANGES IN SOVIET NAVAL POLICY

Soviet naval policy has changed dramatically during the last

decade. Until the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 the fleet, apart

from it submarines, had been assigned a defensive role—the defense

of the homeland. The Cuban crisis must have demonstrated clearly

that any Soviet attempt to influence events in countries outside

the European land mass had to be backed by a military capability

in the area. A navy provides a ready means to demonstrate this

capability, and the presence of ships in foreign waters has the

added advantage of "showing the flag" for political purposes. In

the past few years, therefore, there has been a rapid build-up of

Soviet ocean-going support ships and an increase in naval deploy-

ments far from the boundaries of the USSR. A permanent presence

has been established in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean

and, it now appears, in the Caribbean as well.

Soviet naval and military activities in the Mediterranean area are especially worthy of note. Not only do they increase the threat to NATO's Southern Region significantly, but they also suggest a probable pattern for similar penetration into other areas-- patterns that are, in fact, already evident in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Mediterranean presence started with a token force of ships and submarines supported by auxiliaries at anchorages mainly in the Eastern Mediterranean. This force has now expanded to an average daily total of some 35 ships and 10 submarines supported not only at anchorages throughout the area but also by repair and logistic facilities in the ports of some Arab countries.[3]

The Arab/Israeli War and the urgent Arab need for arms has given the Soviets the opportunity to extend this purely naval presence to the other arms of the service. Now Soviet military advisors and aircraft form the nucleus of a well balanced force that could be dispatched to the area at any time.

IV. THE CHALLENGE IN THE SOUTH

Admiral Horacio Rivero, USN, is the Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe (CINCSOUTH). When speaking at the SHAPE Conference, Admiral Rivero gave his "estimate of the situation" prevailing in his huge and critical command. He tied together the lessons of history and the demands of geography in describing the situation in NATO's Southern Region. Allied Forces Southern Europe (AFSOUTH) is the largest NATO subordinate command with

boundaries which include almost half a million square miles of land in addition to the entire Mediterranean Sea. The three continents--Africa, Asia and Europe--that have held the stage of history longest meet in the Mediterranean. The control of this inland sea and its littoral has been the cause of more rivalries, battles and wars than any other comparable body in the world. NATO control of the Mediterranean denies its use to the USSR in attempting to outflank forces in Central Europe and permits its exploitation in carrying the war to NATO's potential enemies. On the other hand, without the control of this sea, the supply of NATO fighting forces would be seriously affected and the NATO land forces would be exposed to attack on unpredictable fronts.[4]

Admiral Rivero further pointed out that aside from the military threat, the new Soviet presence adds a new dimension to the political and psychological offensives of the USSR. Those who are not well informed about the true naval strength of NATO may be unduly impressed or suffer exaggerated fears from the Soviet naval presence; they may be led to believe that NATO naval power has been neutralized or that the Alliance has lost its ability to defend its interests.

V. USSR: REACHING SEA SUPREMACY?

A recent TIME magazine article reported that US intelligence satellite photos have revealed that in all probability the USSR is building its first attack aircraft carrier. This information has caused widespread comment and speculation among US current and former naval strategists. The concern and attention that this

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seemingly modest naval addition has attracted stems from the fact
that simply adding a carrier force to the Soviet Navy represents a
dramatic and fundamental shift in USSR naval strategy. The Soviet
Navy, since World War II, has scorned the US carriers as "sitting
ducks" and vulnerable.[5]

Throughout the rapid Soviet naval build-up, described earlier
in this paper, the main emphasis has been on establishing a defensive
force. Going into attack carriers adds the offensive balance to a
formidable naval team. Without a carrier force, the psychological
and political impact of the Soviet Navy is far greater than its
actual power and potential would warrant. Its two million man,
superbly equipped, army is still the biggest worry of the NATO
nations. Its airpower, which is continually probing the air
defenses of Western Europe, is developing at a rapid and alarming
rate. However, on the world scene the Soviet fleet is the most
dramatic and assertive manifestation of the Russian will to make
its presence felt.

The TIME article reported further that just in the past year
the Soviet Navy has been able to apply pressure on points that
would cause the US the most political embarrassment and political
discomfort. In less than a decade, for instance, it has started
a sweeping pincers maneuver to outflank NATO on both its southern
and northern sectors. With USSR warships in the North Atlantic
outnumbering those of NATO by a 6 to 1 margin, Denmark and Norway
are understandably anxious about continued membership in an alliance

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that in times of war may not be able to protect them. The same situation is becoming apparent in the Mediterranean area where the USSR fleet outnumbers the US Sixth Fleet 61 ships to 40.[6] This is causing concern in the capitals of Italy, Greece and Turkey, and has Yugoslavia wondering if the USSR, under one pretext or another, might seize and occupy one of its ports on the Adriatic as a permanent base. The afore-mentioned TIME article also stated that, "The strategic value of Yugoslavia as a naval outlet for the Mediterranean heightens the temptation for the Russians to intervene in that country's affairs in the uncertain situation that may well follow Tito's resignation or death."

The heightening of tensions in the Middle East has furnished the USSR fleet with another option in displaying its new naval presence. Soviet warships are frequently in ports of Egypt and Syria, in part to inhibit Israel from making air attacks. (Recall that at the heighth of the "bomb and mine Haiphong" debate, Russian ships were a major consideration in the decision against those tactics.) Currently, the USSR is building huge new naval facilities on the Egyptian coast between Alexandria and the Libyan border. In the event of a new Middle East war, the Soviet fleet, conceivably, could blockade Israel, cutting it off from western aid. Admiral of the USSR Fleet Gorshkov has proclaimed ". . . the protection of the fraternal and peace-loving peoples of the Arab world is a sacred mission of the Soviet Navy."[7] Knowing full well that a blockade of Israel would, in all liklihood cause a confrontation with the US Sixth Fleet, one wonders if Admiral Gorshkov was

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indulging in mere "saber-rattling" or if Soviet strategy would
permit (or welcome) another Cuban-missile-type crisis.

VI. TWO DECADES OF USSR STRATEGY[8]

At this point, it would be worthwhile to look briefly at the
Soviet military strategy and military priorities since Stalin's
death. In this way, I believe that the current accelerated naval
expansion and high profile will be less surprising. Nikita
Krushchev maintained Stalin's policy of extremely heavy emphasis
on conventional forces until about 1954. Apparently at this time,
he acknowledged that the US was able to inflict unacceptable damage
on the USSR through the US long-range bomber fleet. In 1955, Krushchev
stated that co-existence was possible and that there need not be an
inevitibility of war between the East and the West. At the same
time, to the dismay of the military, Krushchev publicized a huge
cutback in Soviet armed forces and expressed a willingness to
discuss disarmament with the US. While the world was digesting this
major change, the Soviet missile program, with no fanfare, was put
into super high gear. Also, their long range bomber program was
expanded to keep a reasonably good pace with the US, at least
until the "rocket forces" were where Krushchev felt they should be.
Then, in 1957, Sputnik stood the West on its ear. Although, in
reality, the US still had nuclear delivery superiority, the
spectacular Sputnik shook the confidence of Western Europe and
other Allies dependent on the US for protection from the Soviet

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Union. So, in the late 1950's and the early 1960's the USSR poured more and more of their strategic arms effort into Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBM) with nuclear warheads, and used this as a real threat to NATO and Europe. Meanwhile, the US, realizing there very well could be a "missile gap" virtually dropped their Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) program and went full speed ahead in its Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) program. The results of all of these strategic moves became apparent to the USSR during the Cuban crisis in 1962. When the wash was hung out to dry, these were the facts the Soviets had to live with:

1. A nuclear confrontation with the US was at hand, and:

   a. The US had ample ICBM's to destroy the USSR, plus a fleet of modern B-52 long range nuclear bombers.

   b. The USSR had a highly efficient force of MRBM's which offered no threat outside of Europe. Their emphasis on the MRBM had cost them dearly on their bomber fleet and their ICBM forces.

2. The USSR recognized that they were strategically inferior, pulled in their horns of embarrassment and moved to correct this awkward situation.

3. The ICBM, which the Soviets had virtually put on the back burner until now, gave the US the "boxer's reach."

It did not take the USSR long to correct the deficiency--and to depose Krushchev. Their current missile inventory--superiority over the US attests to that.

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What does all this have to do with the Soviet's growing naval presence in the Mediterranean? Permit me an amateur's analysis and some speculation. Since World War II the USSR has looked closely at the tactics and strategy of the US because the US was considered a "winner." The USSR has then used its control'ed economy to direct enough effort and money to catch up with and pass the "winner." The Russian global strategy, I think, can be expressed in an analogy compared with American football strategy. Throughout the history of football it has been a strategical game of copying the winners. Recall, for example, the bandwagon-rush caused by the introduction of the T Formation, the Spread Formation and, most recently, the Wishbone T. In my opinion, post-World War II history has shown that as soon as the Soviets have decided US strategy or armament changes appear successful they (USSR) direct their fantastic resources to duplicating or surpassing our efforts. Our navy has enjoyed unchallenged prestige as acknowledged leaders of all the world's seas. This highly visible projection of power has long been a thorn in the side of the Soviets, and, as with previous weapons systems shortcomings, they have set about to enhance their navy's world image.

VII. NATO AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Arms assistance to the Middle East by both the US and the USSR has caused the US to put more pressure on its NATO allies for a permanent NATO fleet in the Mediterranea. This fleet's purpose would not be solely to counteract the Soviet naval presence there,

but to counteract growing USSR air power in the Arab territories, primarily Egypt. Furthermore, the intensive US effort to build a permanent NATO fleet in the Mediterranean is a result of the US concern that the Soviet airbases and the TU-16 bombers in Egypt will serve as a long range threat to the "southern flank" of NATO. US authorities in Brussels are currently arguing for total abandonment of the "boundaries" that now dictate the assignment of naval power by members of NATO to specific waters. Instead of occasional joint fleet maneuvers, the proposed NATO Mediterranean Fleet would operate with the same freedom as the Soviet fleet, would exert a powerful political pressure and would serve as a deterrent to the growing Soviet threat from bases in Egypt. Another advantage is that it would preclude the establishment of the Middle East as virtually an exclusive area of USSR influence.

The future impact of the rapidly growing Soviet Navy on NATO will be great. They are developing great momentum and, at present, are outbuilding the US in naval vessels by the impressive ratio of 8 to 1. In addition, Polish and East German builders are producing merchant ships for Russia. In the front-line high sea naval squadrons, some classes of ships are being replaced by more advanced designs after only eight years of operational duty. The KRESTA II cruisers, whose design is much admired by US naval experts, will apparently be replaced in the near future by the smaller, cheaper but more heavily armed KRIVAC destroyers. "The Soviets," says British Military expert John Erickson, "are building a fleet for the '80's."[9]

In the event of an outbreak of war, which navy would win?
TIME reported that many US Navy men are no longer so cockily
confident of America's overwhelming superiority. TIME also
quoted an unnamed, high ranking US naval authority as saying,
"Take the Mediterranean. If we lost those two bird farms (attack
carriers), we would be in big trouble. It would be the 5 inch gun
(US destroyer's basic weapon) against the 300 mile cruise missile.
Sure we might beat them, but it's not certain." A more optimistic
outlook was expressed by Vice Admiral Gerald E. Miller, commander
of the US Sixth Fleet in a recent statement to the press. Admiral
Miller believes that America's air superiority gives his fleet a
decisive advantage over the larger Russian flotilla. In the event
of war, the Soviet navy would be a prisoner of its geography. Ships
that were not already at sea might never get there.

It is generally conceded by world naval authorities that the
Soviet fleet has some severe shortcomings as an offensive force.
It needs air cover and more permanent and developed bases in its
new areas of operation. As it stands now, it is basically a one-
shot navy and would be left virtually defenseless after that first
effort. However, it is readily apparent that Soviet naval leader-
ship is aware of the shortcomings and is moving ahead at "flank
speed" to eliminate them. NATO, and notably the US, is not doing
enough to maintain the fast vanishing naval superiority currently
enjoyed. A permanent NATO Mediterranean fleet would be an interim
measure, albeit a good one, but a mammoth modernization and

enlargement of the entire NATO fleet is indicated--and with con-
siderable urgency.

Fortunately, the threat is known and NATO leaders are charting
the course that should prevent the Soviet fleet from dominating
the world's oceans in the 1980's. Admiral Rivero, CINCSOUTH,
summed up NATO's position and its confidence in the future as follows:[10]

> While it is natural that we should be concerned
> at the appearance of a new threat, we can take
> some comfort in the fact that the Soviet naval
> squadron is substantially inferior to that of
> NATO's naval forces. Furthermore, I am confident
> that the NATO naval and air forces could effectively
> neutralize major units of the Soviet surface fleet
> in reasonably short order in the event of an
> emergency. In the long run, our superior naval
> power will prevail.

This paper draws no formal conclusions; however, I feel that
two stark realisms have emerged and must be accepted by NATO.
First, due almost entirely to the strength of the US Sixth Fleet,
the USSR presence in the Mediterranean does not now pose a grave
threat to the NATO Alliance. Second, with NATO and the Soviets
both continuing their current paths--both political and military--
the 1980's may well see NATO's naval superiority a thing of the
past.

GRADY A. COLE
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FOOTNOTES

1. NATO's Fifteen Nations Magazine, <u>SHAPE: Twenty Years in the Service of Peace and Security</u> (1971), p. 58.

2. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 59.

3. David Tinnin, <u>Reaching for Supremacy at Sea</u>, (TIME: 31 January 1972), p. 28.

4. NATO's Fifteen Nations Magazine, p. 89.

5. Tinnin, p. 28.

6. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 29.

7. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 30.

8. Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Walter C. Clemens, and Franklin Griffiths, <u>Krushchev and the Arms Race</u> (1966), Information from review of entire book--no verbatim extracted.

9. Tinnin, p. 29.

10. NATO's Fifteen Nations Magazine, p. 96.

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